

DIRECT ACCESS TESTING

A consumer group's perspective

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**“The medical profession is unconsciously
irritated by lay knowledge.”**

John Steinbeck

**“The secret of caring for the patient is
caring for the patient.”**

Sir William Osler

THE CHANGING HEALTH CARE CONSUMER

- The Healthcare Consumer has become the driving force of healthcare.
 - Empowered
 - Demanding
 - Critical of the the system and providers

Empowered

- Better educated
- Has access to experts
- Views healthcare as a service
- Expects high clinical and ethical standards

Demanding

- Today's healthcare consumer expects:
 - Clinical competence
 - Fair pricing
 - Sound business practices
 - Timely communication

Critical of the system and providers

- Consumer health care complaints are at an all time high.
 - State licensing board complaints at record levels.
 - Consumer appeals of managed care decisions are rising.
 - Polls: High consumer DISSATISFACTION with the entire health care system.

Consumers want greater access to services and higher quality care.

- **In 1985, only 5% of consumers said they chose their own hospital -- today nearly 50% say they do.**
- **Consumers are seeking the high quality providers – searching the internet, calling hotlines, etc.**
- **The push for a Medicare drug benefit is the result of consumer pressure.**
- **HIPAA is an outcome of consumer power being translated into policy.**

Quality and effective treatments are the centerpiece of consumer expectations.

- **States are passing disclosure laws and other Acts that allow consumers to compare practitioners and facilities.**
- **Some states are publishing managed care company comparisons based on key indicators.**
- **HEDIS and other measuring devices help to assure consumers of plan and provider quality.**

Consumers are angry!

- **Tired of being treated as a “medical idiot”**
- **The parent/child provider-consumer relationship is no longer acceptable.**
- **Failure to disclose and inform is no longer welcome.**
 - **Malpractice insurers report #1 reason for a claim being filed is lack of communication.**

TODAY'S HEALTH CARE PROVIDER

OLD SCHOOL

- Arrogant
- Secretive
- Unresponsive

DYING

NEW SCHOOL

- Compassionate
- Open and Informative
- Available

SURVIVER

THE LAST BASTION OF NON-CONSUMERISM!

- Health care services do not parallel other consumer services in terms of:
 - *DISCLOSURE*
 - *EASE OF ACCESS*
 - *ACCOUNTABILITY*
 - *OVER ALL COMMITMENT TO THE CUSTOMER*

GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN NON-RESPONSIVE!

- Laws governing medicine are widely varied
 - Lack of uniformity
 - Mostly benefiting providers
 - Less likely to be consumer friendly
- Rules are confusing, often uninforced
 - Complexity creates chaos
 - Slow to be corrected
 - Viewed by as cumbersome by all parties

THE BABY BOOMER ENGINE

- The Baby Boomer is the driver of a new paradigm
 - Systems have had to respond to this generation
 - Historical consumer provider relationships have blurred.
- Baby Boomers have high and immediate expectations
 - The system must work
 - If it's broken, fix it

DIRECT ACCESS TESTING

- 34 states allow direct access to medical testing
 - Even in states where available, most consumers are unaware of its availability
- Primary care physicians tend to support it
- Consumers have been asking for it for years
 - Since the early 80's, People's Medical Society members have overwhelmingly favored it

THE ADVANTAGES

- Direct access to needed services
- Reduced costs by eliminating the “middle man”
- Individual ability to monitor one’s own health
- Empowering consumers to take charge of their own health

DIRECT ACCESS TO NEEDED SERVICES

- Chronic conditions require regular monitoring
 - Direct access knocks down barriers
- The more access, the more available services will become
 - More laboratories will appear in more locales
- Competition will foster lower prices and higher quality
 - Direct access will put price and quality in the spotlight

REDUCED COSTS BY ELIMINATING THE “MIDDLE MAN”

- Unnecessary physician visits will be reduced
 - Direct access removes a cost that may not be necessary
- Consumer may shop for services
 - Consumer selection means more attention to cost

INDIVIDUAL ABILITY TO MONITOR ONE'S OWN HEALTH

- Direct access puts the control in the hands of the consumer
 - Likely to increase attention to condition
- Direct access can occur anywhere
 - No longer limited by geography of provider
- More awareness of the nature and course of the condition
 - Consumer responsible for managing his/her care

EMPOWERING CONSUMERS TO TAKE CHARGE OF THEIR OWN HEALTH

- Direct access puts the consumer in charge
 - Shifts responsibilities
- Gives consumers direct access to information
 - No longer controlled by specific providers
- Give consumers ownership
 - It's me, my body, I'm in control

THE DISADVANTAGES

- Physicians may lose some control over patient management
- The tendency towards hypochondria
- Consumers inability to interpret results
- Charlatans may take advantage of unsuspecting consumers
- Test costs may rise

PHYSICIANS MAY LOSE SOME CONTROL OVER PATIENT MANAGEMENT

- Direct testing means less physician visits
 - Consumers may attempt harmful or useless self-treatment as a result of direct testing
- Severe medical problems may be ignored
 - Consumers may fear possible follow-up treatments or follow-up costs

THE TENDENCY TOWARDS HYPOCHONDRIA

- Direct testing may lead to more unnecessary testing
 - Worried consumers may over-test out of fear
- Lack of knowledge about meaning of test results may cause higher anxiety
 - May foster demand for unnecessary treatment

CONSUMER'S INABILITY TO INTERPRET RESULTS

- Analysis of results may be outside consumers knowledge base
 - May over- or under-react to results
- May not know where to turn for help
 - Lack of knowledge of specialties or available resources
- May resort to “over the fence” advice
 - Tendency to have friends interpret rather than professionals

CHARLATANS MAY TAKE ADVANTAGE OF UNSUSPECTING CONSUMER

- Direct testing may foster unscrupulous laboratories
 - The more direct access a consumer has, the more likely less than stellar providers will appear
- Shady business practices are poorly policed by the states
 - States already have problems regulating the business side of health care

TEST COSTS MAY RISE

- Direct access may foster higher testing prices
 - In health care, the greater the demand, the higher the cost
- Individual rates will be higher than those negotiated by insurers
 - Ability to regulate costs in an open economic environment will be difficult

PROs VS CONs

- The pros outweigh the cons
 - To date direct access has demonstrated few problems
 - Disadvantages can be addressed through
 - Education
 - Regulation
 - Oversight
 - Enforcement

IT'S NOT GOING TO BE EASY

- Direct access to testing is going to require a great deal of attention:
 - Assurance of uniform clinical standards
 - Assurance of mandatory disclosure requirements
 - Development of consumer-focused business practices standards
 - Development of national operating guidelines

UNIFORM CLINICAL STANDARDS

- Consumers must expect high quality at every lab and for every test
- Agencies responsible for oversight must be certified by a national entity or federal unit
- Test availability should be the same in all states
- Labs and oversight organizations must be legally accountable for all their actions

MANDATORY DISCLOSURE REQUIREMENTS

- All labs must be required to publicly disclose:
 - Certification
 - Qualifications of all personnel
 - Number of tests, by test, performed annually
 - Reprimands or actions taken by inspecting and licensing authorities

CONSUMER-FOCUSED BUSINESS STANDARDS

- Prompt reporting of all test results
- Consumer useable interpretations of results
- Availability of clinician to advise
- Mandatory red-flagging of serious problems
- Available referral services to appropriate specialist
- No financial arrangements with any referral entity

MORE BUSINESS STANDARDS

- Public posting of all test prices
- No hidden or undisclosed service charges
- Privacy standards
- Standards aimed at reducing unnecessary testing

NATIONAL OPERATING GUIDELINES

- All consumer practices of all labs should be uniform

ISSUES TO ADDRESS

- Insurance coverage
- State variation on access and oversight
- Expansion of direct access tests
- Limitations on number of particular tests in a given year
- Ownership of results
- Resistance from other providers